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Intelligence Estimate Revealed Unintentionally

Washington—A secret U. S. intelligence estimate that the Soviet Union could have the capability to deploy a space-based, high-energy laser weapon station within a year was unintentionally revealed in a House Armed Services Committee hearing in late February, confirming earlier AVIATION WEEK & SPACE TECHNOLOGY reports (May 25, 1981, p. 40; July 28, 1980, p. 32).

The USSR's accelerated space-based, high-energy laser program was described in a secret statement to the committee by Richard D. DeLauer, under secretary of Defense for research and engineering. It included the assessment that the initial operational capability of the Soviet laser battle station could be as early as 1983, or as late as 1988.

Rep. Ken Kramer (R-Colo.), a member of the committee, read aloud in a House Armed Services hearing earlier testimony by DeLauer given in a closed session that provided an insight into Soviet laser weapon development activities.

That assessment, based on intelligence community information, concluded that the laser space station could provide an antisatellite weapon capable of destroying U. S. surveillance spacecraft, communications satellites or early warning satellites that operate at geosynchronous altitudes.

By the early 1990s, according to DeLauer's statement, the Soviets could have a large space complex in orbit capable of attacking a variety of targets within the Earth's atmosphere from space.

Kramer's words during the open hearing were labeled inadvertent by staff members, who said that he believed the hearing to be a closed session.